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ABSTRACT

The principal, as an instructional leader of the school, should be certain that each reluctant learner is: (1) provided a school environment where students are rewarded often for their achievements and successes; (2) tangibly rewarded for academic achievement and appropriate behavior; (3) strengthened with strong ties between the home and the school by reaching out to the parents and the community; (4) recognized in assemblies, honor rolls and public lists for achievements; (5) engaged in relevant learning experiences; (6) required to know the expected behavior for achievement in the school; (7) required to do at least 30 minutes of homework per class daily; (8) provided an opportunity to participate in "course help sessions" conducted by teachers; (9) provided an opportunity for a "second chance" test when a test is failed; (10) given the opportunity to be caught doing something good and right; (11) involved in a school activity and some of its planning functions; and (12) provided a prevention of failure program in the first grade. (Author/JD)

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HOW THE PRINCIPAL CAN PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE RELUCTANT LEARNER?

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How the Principal can Provide Instructional Leadership for the Reluctant Learner?

Abstract

Improving the academic performance of reluctant learners has been a concern of teachers, principals, and other professional and school staff for many years. This paper explores some of the practices principals should have in which may be effective with reluctant learners, for example, appropriate school environments, recognizing effective curriculum models, and assisting the instructional staff with adding more relevancy to courses taught. More specifically, the principal as an instructional leader should be certain that each reluctant learner is: (1) provided a school environment where students are rewarded often for their achievements and successes, (2) tangibly rewarded for academic achievement and appropriate behavior, (3) strengthened with strong ties between the home and the school by reaching out to the parents and the community, (4) recognized in assemblies, honor rolls and public lists for achievements, (5) receiving relevant learning experiences, (6) required to know the expected behavior for achievement in the school, (7) required to do at least 30 minutes of homework per class daily, (8) provided an opportunity to participate in "course help sessions" conducted by teachers, (9) provided an opportunity for a "second chance" test when a test is failed, (10) given the opportunity to be caught doing something good and right, (11) involved in a school activity and some of its planning functions and, (12) provided a prevention of failure program in the first grade.

How the Principal Can Provide Instructional Leadership for the Reluctant Learner?

Throughout the many years of providing education for youth in an organized setting, educational administrators have struggled with trying to meet the needs and change reluctant learners in their schools. Many of these learners, because of their perception of the school environment, do not feel a part of the school and they are not achieving at the level to be productive members of the larger society. Therefore, to be an effective instructional leader, a principal should have a clear vision of some of the basic practices of a school that must be in place to provide effective classroom assistance and support to teachers to motivate reluctant learners.

Motivation of students is a topic that seems to be tied to many solutions to improve a school. School administrators and teachers have been frustrated to no end to come up with instructional techniques to have success with the reluctant learner.

It is commonly agreed upon that the principal through instructional leadership is the best bet for improving student achievement in the school. The principal must assume, as instructional leader, a more active, direct role in getting reluctant learners to learn, and experience success in the school.

Who are the reluctant learners in the school? A reluctant learner is any student in the school who is unwilling to learn or take advantage of the educational opportunities provided in the school. Another way of stating this, **These are students:** (1) who

no longer have the desires/ambition to learn and the ability to recognize the opportunity for success in school (2) who resist the will of the teacher; (3) who lack the drive to complete a task; (4) who do not see value in learning what they should learn to be successful in life; and (5) who are underachieving at their level of academic potential.

Though the motivation to learn comes from the inside of an individual, the principal, as instructional leader, must see to it that each student in his/her school is moved to learn. **To say it another way**, only the individual can motivate himself or herself; other people merely set the stage or provide suitable conditions for motivation (Doll 1989). Thus, the principal must be certain that the school provides a suitable environment for the reluctant learner to be motivated to learn.

According to Doll (1989), teachers can help learners motivate themselves by: (1) showing their interest in and appreciation of learners; (2) personalizing or tailoring their teaching, (3) teaching varied teaching techniques in different ways -- that is, sometimes directly, sometimes nondirectively; (4) providing study helps and giving learners feedback and immediate rewards, and (5) helping learners feel genuinely competent. These five strategies for teachers to use to help learners motivate themselves are just as important for the principal as they are for the teacher for this group of students because the instructional leader must make these strategies a reality in the school.

The school environment is important to the building manager, student, and teacher. It is in this environment where principals

manage and provide instructional leadership; teachers teach, and students learn. According to Hamby (1989), people avoid situations in which they feel physically or emotionally threatened. Thus it is essential for the principal to make the school environment as secure as possible. It is also in the school environment that, positive relationships between student-teacher-principal and principal-student-teacher must exist to raise the academic performance of the reluctant learners. In fact, Matthews and Holmes (1983), reported that raising the academic performance of students involves encouraging positive student-teacher relations, exhibiting high expectations for academic performance and developing positive student self-concepts.

I think the principal should be certain the school environment is inviting and supportive for each student in attendance. When students feel and share this sense of their school environment, they know that they truly belong and they show an increased willingness to achieve. Lehr and Harris (1988) put it this way, they said the principal must provide the leadership to create an inviting, supportive learning environment for staff and students.

I need not say in the school world of some reluctant learners it is a common view that respect is not apparent in the way teachers act toward students. So the principal must create a high-quality school environment where respect is evident and a sense of belonging is present. This of course will provide the appropriate setting for satisfaction and productivity to be present in each student.

The teacher, not counting the student, is the single most important individual in the school. The teacher is the individual that plans and transmits the learning to the student. The teacher implements the school curriculum. In short, the teacher, for example, is where, "the rubber meets the road". In addition, teachers are precious people who cause joyful happenings in the hearts and minds of students.

Some writers have very clear views of good teachers. Wood, Nicholson and Findley (1985) reported Miller-Miller concluded in their research that good teachers: (1) personalize their teaching; (2) know their subject matter and related areas; (3) can see the world from the student's point of view; (4) maintain a neat personal appearance; (5) use English correctly; (6) adjust the program to the ability of the individual student; and (7) organize materials well and show enthusiasm in teaching.

Good teachers motivate reluctant learners to enjoy school and learning. They help these students to see purpose in what they are expected to learn. In this case, the good teacher arouses a desire to learn.

Motivation has two meanings. The first and primary meaning, motivation is a desire within the student to learn. It is a desire to learn that is self-started. The second meaning is found in those actions teachers take to arouse desire on the part, of the learner to learn. In regard to teacher arousal, Olivia (1989) reported that learners are motivated (1). when they conceive of themselves as capable individuals. They feel that their peers, teachers, and others in their environment recognize them as able

to achieve. (2). if they live in a safe and orderly, and attractive environment, they have opportunities to express their psychological needs for success, recognition, and approval. Students must feel the learning experiences are for them, not for the teacher. (3). when the teacher is motivated, enthusiasm is contagious. The disinterested teacher cannot expect the students to express interest in the subject matter, school, or learning in general. (4). when they experience success more often than failure. The feeling of achievement that accompanies success motivates the student to want to learn.

Students tend to have clear ideas about what constitutes a good teacher. For instance, Firestone (1989) reported that students said, a good teacher is fun, caring, devoted, patient, intelligent, a role model, expressive and personal. Firestone also found that the students wanted the teacher to make the work interesting and, even more important, to explain again when students did not understand the first time.

There is very little real difference between what professionals describe as a good teacher, and what students describe as a good teacher. In each case, the descriptions of a good teacher are caring, personal and teaching to the individual needs, interest and success of students.

The principal as instructional leader must encourage and assist teachers in planning and developing more arousal type activities for reluctant learners. The principal must also see to it that all teachers in the school have planned successful learning experiences for each student in the class for each lesson taught.

As instructional leader, the principal, through successful student learning experiences, creates hope in students and teachers in their classroom work which may have been permeated with despair. Finally, the principal must keep the school environment mindful of the old cliche "success breeds success and failure breeds failure."

There is a need for principals as instructional leaders to be able to recognize programs which have proved or potentially effective for reluctant learners. It appears that these effective programs can be placed in three categories: **prevention, classroom change, and remediation** Slavin and Madden (1989).

A prevention program is perhaps the most effective program a school could have in its curriculum. Programs of this type are designed to keep students from developing learning problems. Prevention programs typically focus on preschool, kindergarten, or first grade.

Headstart is perhaps the most widely used preschool program to prevent learning problems with disadvantage children. However, according to Karweit (1989) and Slavin and Madden (1989), research on preschool tends to find strong effects on the language and IQ scores of disadvantaged children immediately after the preschool experience; but these effects diminish each subsequent year until by the second or third grade, they are undetectable.

Some researchers feel the first grade is the appropriate time to have an effective prevention program. Again Slavin and Madden (1989) concluded that though well-structured preschool and Kindergarten programs can prepare students to learn to read in first grade, but the most important single element of prevention

is to use programs in the first grade to ensure that students who do not make adequate progress in reading will receive immediate and intensive assistance. The most effective first grade prevention program is as follows:

Reading Recovery (Deford, Pinnell, Lyons and Young 1987)	**Students tutored by specially trained teachers 30 minutes per day at least 60 days**

Classroom change programs seem to be designed to accelerate student achievement. These programs, hopefully, will turn on as well as accelerate the reluctant learner. Slavin and Madden (1989) found these programs to be basically continuous progress models and a form of cooperative learning. Programs found to be effective in this category are as follows:

Program/Source	Grades/Subject	Description
DISTAR (Becker and Carnine 1980)	**K-6 Reading Math**	**Teacher instructs small groups using highly structured scripted lessons. Students frequently assessed, regrouped.**
U-SAIL	**1-9 Reading Math**	**Combines continuous progress, individualized activities. Adapts to existing curriculum materials.**
PEGASUS-PACE	**K-8 Reading**	**Students proceed through 17 reading levels. Grades K-8, frequently assessed and re-grouped.**
Team Accelerated Instruction (Slavin et.al. 1984; Slavin & Karweit 1985)	**3-6 Math**	**Students work on programmed materials in mixed ability teams while teachers teach same-ability teaching groups.**

Cooperative Integrated Reading & Composition (Stevens, et.al. 1987)	**3-5 Reading Writing**	**Students work in mixed ability teams or partner reading, story grammar, summarization, vocabulary, reading comprehension spelling, and writing while teacher teaches reading group.**

The third group of program falls in the category of remedial models. These programs are sometimes referred to as supplementary. Many times these programs are used with students who have fallen behind in their basic learning skills.

Principals as instructional leaders of their school need to know programs which are effective with students who have fallen behind in basic skills because of the student's reluctancy to learn. Programs showing convincing evidence of effectiveness fall into two major categories: **remedial tutoring programs and computer assisted instruction**, Slavin and Madden (1989).

There are many different form of remedial tutoring programs. Some remedial models have one-to-one or one-to-five tutoring. In other words, one individual is working with a small group of students. Usually, tutoring programs use older students or volunteers to tutor students in need of assistance.

Computer-assisted Instruction is the second remedial model. According to Slavin and Madden (1989) the best-evaluated and most consistently effective CAI models have been forms of the Computer Curriculum Corporation drill-and-practice programs. Computer-assisted Instruction has helped some students to experience success in school for the first time. Gross (1989) reported that students who had failed throughout their school years, were for the first time, experiencing academic success. That success kept them coming

back. She also reported that the Computer proctors heard students' remark about their success, **"The computer doesn't hate me"**, **"It gives me a second chance"** and **"I can do it"**.

At a time when principals are given the opportunity to make more decisions at the building level, it is important for them to be aware of effective curriculum models for reluctant learners. The principal's decisions and choices of programs to be used with reluctant learners will have a lot to do with the over all effectiveness of the school program.

There is one other curriculum model which may be effective with reluctant learners. It is an alternative program which was developed for students, at Appollo High School, Simi Valley, California, who have not succeeded in a traditional high school environment. In this program, the goal is to increase students' self-esteem, with the understanding that self-esteem produces achievement. Greene and Uroff (1989) reported that to help students build their self-esteem, the Apollo staff provided them with the four A's: **Attention, Acceptance, Appreciation, and Affection**.

It appears that there is not enough relevancy in the school program for reluctant learners. These students are frequently heard by teachers saying **"I don't see why I should learn this"**, or **"I don't see the purpose of Chemistry, geometry, algebra and etc."** Perhaps these students are taking the narrowest view of what is worth learning. Nevertheless, it is a view that inhibits these students from learning.

I believe the principal, teacher and counselor should play a more active part in resolving the issue of relevancy of subject matter to be learned. The principal, of course, as instructional leader, should provide the leadership.

Relevancy in school programs is not an easy issue to address. However, relevancy in school courses to be learned by reluctant learners can the strengthen in three areas: teaching of subject, future employment and program coordination.

Relevancy in the teaching of a subject can be strength by including more practical applications of course concepts. For example, in mathematics, teach a concept then take the class outside of the classroom (campus, industry, or business) and apply that concept to solve a problem. This approach to teaching the subject will accomplish two things: (1) students will see and experience an application of skill learned; (2) relate skill learned to a profession or job.

Future employment seems to send a powerful message to reluctant learners. Firestone (1989) reported that programs that trained students to be dental technicians, truck drivers, bank tellers, and the like had considerable appeal. So it would be wise for the principal and counselor to tie all school learning experiences to short-term and long-term employment potential.

Program coordination may be the area in the school program where relevancy is in need of strengthening the most. When program coordination is emphasized and practiced in the school students can easily see the connection one course has for the other. Students are reminded by teachers frequently of the skills in one course

that must be learned in another course to do well academically or in future years of life. Courses in which the same concept is taught are coordinated by the teachers to provide for clarity in the instructional program. Each teacher will be sending the same message on the same concept in the same manner with clarity of the instructional process. Greenfield (1987) said that clarity refers to the extent to which the instructional process is understood and can be specified.

As instructional leaders, the principal is responsible for the appropriate school environment and quality of instruction provided for all students which include the reluctant learners also. These instructional leaders should see to it that teachers practice the characteristics of a "good teacher" as seen by students. The principal must also be able to recognize effective curriculum models for reluctant learners and increase the relevancy of student learning experiences. More specifically, the principal as instructional leader must see to it that each reluctant learner is:

1. provided a school environment where students are rewarded often for their achievements and successes;
2. rewarded tangibly for academic achievement and appropriate behavior;
3. recognized frequently during assemblies, honor rolls, and public list for some academic achievement;
4. strengthened by developing strong ties between the home and the school by reaching out to parents and the community;
5. required to know the expected behavior for achievement in the school;

6. required to do at least 30 minutes of homework per class daily. The principal will place homework at a value of 25% of the grade and it must be graded by teachers and returned to students providing meaningful feedback;

7. provided an opportunity to participate in **"course help sessions"** conducted by the teacher for students in need of additional help;

8. provided an opportunity for a **"second chance"** test when a test is failed;

9. given the opportunity to be caught doing something good and right and appraised for the appropriate behavior;

10. given an opportunity to experience success in coursework learnings;

11. receiving relevant learning experiences in their school courses;

12. involved in a school activity and some of its planning functions; and

13. provided a prevention from failure program in the first grade.

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